



Inmate Telephone Service

Acting on its mandate to ensure that rates for phone calls are just, reasonable, and fair for all Americans, the FCC is working to rein in the excessive rates and egregious fees on phone calls paid by some of society's most vulnerable: people trying to stay in touch with loved ones serving time in jail or prison.

In most cases, inmates' telephone calling options are limited to one or more of the following calling types: collect, debit account or pre-paid account. Also, incarcerated persons typically may not choose their long distance service provider. These factors, combined with unrestricted long-distance rates, have often resulted in unreasonably high phone bills for inmates' families.

New rate caps for interstate calls from prisons

On October 22, 2015, the FCC took action (<https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-takes-next-big-steps-reducing-inmate-calling-rates>) to cap rates for local and in-state long-distance inmate calling and cut its existing cap on interstate long-distance calls by up to 50 percent. The FCC also closed loopholes by barring most add-on fees imposed by inmate calling service (ICS) providers, which can add nearly 40% to the cost of a single call, and set strict limits on the few fees that remain.

The rules affecting prisons were scheduled to take effect March 17, 2016, and the rules affecting jails were scheduled to take effect June 20, 2016. However, the rules were partially stayed on March 7 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, pending the outcome of a petition for court review.

As the court has now made clear, the stay delays implementation of the new rate caps and the caps for single-call services. However, the court limited the stay to those particular rules. Rules barring other add-on fees were not stayed and will take effect on schedule.

Current rate caps for interstate calls from prisons.

Since Feb. 11, 2014, FCC rate caps for interstate calls are:

- \$0.25 per minute for collect calls
- \$0.21 per minute for debit or pre-paid calls

Charges on inmate calls that exceed these interim rate caps are in violation of federal rules.

Ancillary service charges

The Commission has also limited the types of ancillary services for which providers are permitted to charge ICS users and capped the amounts providers can charge for the permitted fees. Specifically, the Commission prohibited any ancillary service charges, except for the following:

Permitted Ancillary Service Charges and Taxes	Monetary Cap Per Use / Instruction
Applicable taxes and regulatory fees	Provider shall pass these charges through to consumers directly with no markup
Automated payment fees ¹	\$3.00
Live agent fee, i.e., phone payment or account set up with optional use of a live operator	\$5.95
Paper bill/statement fees (no charge permitted for electronic bills/statements)	\$2.00
Prepaid account funding minimums and maximums	Prohibit prepaid account funding minimums and prohibit prepaid account funding maximums under \$50
Third-party financial transaction fees, e.g., MoneyGram, Western Union, credit card processing fees and transfers from third party commissary accounts	Provider shall pass this charge through to end user directly, with no markup

As noted above, the Commission's rule prohibiting a markup on single-call and related services has been stayed and is not included in this table. The ancillary service charges rules apply to calls from prisons as of March 17, 2016, and to calls from jails as of June 20, 2016.

Calls involving the use of TTY

In addition, the Commission acted to protect ICS users with communications disabilities by limiting charges for ICS calls involving the use of TTY (text telephones). Per-minute rates for TTY-to-TTY calls are capped at 25 percent of the rates providers charge for traditional ICS calls and providers are not permitted to collect any charge or fee for TTY-to-voice or voice-to-TTY calls.

Other provisions related to ICS

Moreover, no inmate calling service provider may block a collect call solely because it lacks a prior billing relationship with the called party's telephone provider unless the provider also offers debit, pre-paid or pre-paid collect calling options.

FCC rules require that, when an inmate places a collect call, each operator service provider must identify itself to the person receiving the call before connecting the call. Each operator service provider must also disclose, before connecting the call, how the receiving party may obtain rate quotations. Additionally, the operator service provider must permit the receiving party to terminate the telephone call at no charge before the call is connected. These rules apply only to interstate operator service provider calls.

Filing a complaint

If you feel you or a family member has been overcharged by an inmate calling service provider, you can file a complaint with the FCC. You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL 1-844-432-2275

¹ Automated payments include payments by interactive voice response (IVR), web, or kiosk.

- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Other resources

Most states have similar rules for intrastate (within a state) ICS calls. To complain about rates for intrastate collect calls from public phones in prisons, contact the state public utility commission in the state where the call originated and terminated. State public utility commission addresses may be found at www.naruc.org/Commissions or in the blue pages or government section of your local telephone directory.

Accessible formats

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